

the most practised contortionist, if pregnant, could hardly sustain for a quarter of an hour.

These positions were illustrated first in "La Comare," published in 1596, not 1642, as stated by your reviewer.

I am, Sir, yours faithfully,

Hatley-street, W., May 18th, 1912. HERBERT R. SPENCER.

## FIRST-COUSIN MARRIAGES.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—May I trespass upon your space to ask your readers for any information they may possess as to first-cousin marriages? The information I require is: 1. Whether the contracting parties are themselves the offspring of (a) two brothers or two sisters; (b) a brother and sister respectively. 2. The physique and intelligence of the children of such cousin marriages.

I shall be greatly obliged for any information upon these points that may be sent me before the end of June.

I am, Sir, yours faithfully,

MACLEOD YEARSLEY.

59, Queen Anne-street, W., May 15th, 1912.

## THE MEDICAL PROFESSION AND THE NATIONAL INSURANCE ACT.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—Of all the suggested solutions of this complicated problem the only one which appears to me likely to satisfy the profession generally is that the sum allotted for medical benefit should be handed over to each insured person, leaving it open to him to make his own arrangements for professional attendance. If he prefers to be attended on contract terms he will surely find some practitioner in his neighbourhood willing to oblige him; while those of us who favour the system of a definite fee for each visit or consultation will still be free to carry on our practices on our present lines, graduating our fees, as we always do, according to our patients' ability to pay them. If the sum allotted by the State to each insured person be insufficient to provide him with a year's attendance, under contract or otherwise, let him pay the balance out of his own pocket. In either case, he will be no worse off than he is now; better, in fact, to the amount of 6s., or whatever the allotted sum may be.

The figures quoted by Dr. Francis Villy, in his letter in your issue of May 18th, are very suggestive. They seem to give us some indication of what we may expect if we allow ourselves to be tied hand and foot to the Chancellor's scheme. Dr. Villy suggests 1500 patients as the number required by each practitioner to provide him with the living wage, if I may so call it, of £500 a year, assuming the capitation fee to be 6s. 6d. But if 1500 patients were insured in this way, and knew that they could obtain unlimited medical attendance simply by asking for it, we may depend upon it that they would take full advantage of their privilege. I think I am within the mark when I say that at least a third of them would be on the practitioner's list every day for some ailment, real or imaginary. Now, Sir, I ask you, how could any man honestly pretend to give adequate attention to 500 patients in one day? And if he did succeed in getting through such a list, what time or energy would he have left for such of his patients as did not come under the operation of the Act?

I am, Sir, yours faithfully,

T. R. HENDERSON, M.B., C.M. Edin.

Balham, S.W., May 19th, 1912.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—With your permission I would draw attention to a part of Mr. Lloyd George's speech in the second reading debate on the Welsh Disestablishment Bill:—

"The people never send for medical aid for petty ailments. The doctor is not summoned even for important family events. He is only called in when life is in jeopardy, and here in these districts you have 50 square miles without a doctor. Ask people who have lived on a wayside farm in those districts, or in the villages in the valleys, and they will tell you one of the most vivid memories of their youth is being waked in the dead of night by the clatter of a horse ridden furiously past in the dark, from which everybody knew there was a dire struggle for life going on in the hills."

This is, indeed, a true and terrible picture of the dearth of medical assistance in certain parts of Mr. Lloyd George's

native land. The doctor is only called in "when life is in jeopardy"! Only one doctor for 50 square miles! What is the National Insurance Act going to do to remedy this grave state of things in Wales? It is to be presumed that some of the insured will be found in "these mountain regions," where, "before you reach the high road, there are miles of track, broken and rutted by the winter rains." Are they to be debarred from sending for the doctor unless life is in jeopardy? It is preposterous to suppose that for a capitation fee of 8s. 6d., or even 10s., proper medical attendance could be given to insured persons living under the conditions Mr. Lloyd George so aptly describes. But it would be thought that under a true national insurance scheme the dwellers in such parts of the kingdom would have the same right to medical benefit as in other districts. Under the Vaccination Acts there is much greater latitude with regard to fees payable in different parts of the country. The public vaccinator might get in such districts 15s. per case when his brethren elsewhere might have to be satisfied with a modest half-crown. The National Insurance Act makes no such allowance. If the limit of 6s. a head is exceeded, nothing more is attainable without a special grant by Parliament, or the consent of the County Council to pay half of any extra sum demanded. It is true, there has been expressed a view in high quarters that if a dole of 6s. is handed to the insured in the name of "medical benefit" the provisions of the Act are sufficiently complied with. This may be technically correct, but when we contemplate the fact that the insured, the employers, and the State are compelled to contribute to what is styled "medical benefit," and the result is a gratuity of 6s. to be employed somehow in obtaining medical attendance in sickness, we are forcibly reminded of the classical adage, *Parturiunt montes, nascetur ridiculus mus!*

I am, Sir, yours faithfully,

May 20th, 1912.

MAJOR GREENWOOD.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—The following result of our canvass in the borough of Lewisham may help to encourage other districts to do likewise:—

Number of practitioners resident in the borough	...	...	147
" " in actual practice	...	...	104
" " not practising, retired, or holding resident hospital posts or public appointments	...	...	43
" " engaged in contract practice	...	...	49
" " who have signed resignations	...	...	47
" " " " B.M.A. pledge	...	...	106
" " made up (1) by those in actual practice	...	...	99
" " " (2) by those in hospital or public posts	...	...	7

The two gentlemen who have not handed in their resignations have signed the B.M.A. undertaking. Of the five gentlemen in actual practice who have not signed the B.M.A. pledge, three have signed the B.M.A. undertaking. Only two refuse to sign anything, one of whom, though resident in the borough, practises chiefly outside.

I am, Sir, yours faithfully,

EDGAR DU CANE,

Hon. Secretary Lewisham Provisional Medical Committee.  
May 15th, 1912.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR.—It is now evident that the medical profession realises that it must consider a constructive policy and not merely—that which has been its duty since the introduction of the National Insurance Act—a destructive policy. No doubt we in the medical profession all realise now that the old order is changing, giving place to new, and that we not only cannot go on as previously, but that the old system, or want of system, has become a worn-out garment, however fresh and good and desirable it was at first and in our fathers' time.

In a pamphlet sent to me by Dr. R. R. Rentoul, of Liverpool, he states: "People are asking, Can doctors cease their clamorous protests and tell us definitely what they will and will not accept? They ask, Why are doctors so disastrously cut up by petty jealousies that they cannot combine to form a constructive force, when even scavengers and dock labourers can combine?"

Realising that we have to consider the changed times we